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SUBJECT: CONGRESSIONAL TURKEY STUDY GROUP/CODEL WEXLER

VISIT TURKEY, MAY 31-JUNE 2

(U) Classified by CDA James Moore, E.O. 12958, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: The Congressional Turkey Study Group visited Turkey May 31 - June 2, meeting with PM Erdogan, FM Gul, CHOD Ozkok, Economy Minister and chief EU negotiator Babacan, DefMin Gonul, Parliament Speaker Arinc. Media coverage was positive, even from normally anti-U.S. outlets. All expressed appreciation for the Group's direct flight to and from north Cyprus. On Iraq, most interlocutors focused on areas of U.S./Turkish cooperation and the need to continue it. The Group raised Turkey's warming relations with Syria several times, including with the PM, but made little headway. Economy Minister Babacan emphasized the GOT's commitment to economic reform. In Istanbul, the Group discussed religious freedom with Jewish community and Ecumenical Patriarchate representatives. End Summary.

Media Atmospherics

2. (U) The Study Group's visit to northern Cyprus generated uniformly positive coverage, even in media outlets generally hostile to the United States. A front-page story in the mainstream daily *Milliyet* hailed the visit as an historic step, and one of the paper's more anti-American columnists wrote that the visit showed that the Americans can do what the EU can't. In the Islamist-oriented *Yeni Safak*, a paper generally brimming with hostility to the U.S., the headline was Representative Whitfield's comment: "I hope President Papadopoulos Got the Message." All media outlets viewed the visit as a breakthrough for Turkish Cypriots, and many interpreted it as a U.S. effort to bring the Greek Cypriots back to the negotiating table. Many commentators argued that the delegation's visit would significantly improve the atmosphere in U.S.-Turkish relations on the eve of the Prime Minister's visit to Washington.

Parliament Speaker Arinc

3. (C) Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) Speaker Arinc emphasized the importance of inter-parliamentary visits. He expressed satisfaction with his recent visit to the U.S. and encouraged more exchanges between U.S. members of Congress and Turkish parliamentarians. Arinc and two other TGNA members attending the meeting -- Egemen Bagis (AKP) and Mustafa Elekdag (CHP) -- applauded the Study Group for their important and courageous decision to visit northern Cyprus. Arinc also stated, however, that "we need to eliminate outside influences on our relationship." (Comment: Most likely directed against the Greek and Armenian lobbies in the U.S. End Comment.)

PM Erdogan

4. (C) Expressing appreciation for the Study Group's trip directly to north Cyprus and back, Erdogan reiterated GOT complaints about the Republic of Cyprus' entry into the EU despite rejecting the Annan Plan referendum. Asserting that the U.S.-Turkish strategic partnership continues, Erdogan called the Study Group an important vehicle to improve strategic cooperation. He complained at length about Armenian diaspora efforts to obtain genocide resolutions. Erdogan called for more determination from the U.S. side to raise bilateral trade (i.e., Turkish exports), and looked in particular to new efforts from the Study Group.

5. (C) Representative Whitfield emphasized the importance of building personal trust even if on some issues there could be significant differences of opinion. In praising Erdogan's policies on Cyprus and Afghanistan, Representative Wexler noted concerns about the AKP government's policies toward Syria. As even the MFA's former Undersecretary Ziyal had underscored, the only way to be successful with Syria is to apply consistent, unified pressure on its regime. In this regard, compared to the U.S., western Europe, and Syria's Arab neighbors, Turkey's posture appears different.

6. (C) Erdogan rejected this analysis. He claimed Turkey's role in Syria's pullout from Lebanon was "very large." It was after Erdogan's and during President Sezer's subsequent

visit that Assad said he would withdraw; thus, the Turkish visits caused the withdrawal. He asserted that Assad is open to democracy and reform, adding that patience is needed. Turkey is able to cooperate with Syria against terrorism, both PKK and "religious terrorists."

State Minister Babacan

17. (C) Economy Minister (and newly-named EU Chief Negotiator) Ali Babacan briefed the Study Group on positive developments in the Turkish economy since the 2001 financial crisis. Babacan reiterated the GOT's commitment to a tight fiscal policy and central bank independence. Stressing the importance of foreign investment and the GOT's interest in encouraging foreign investment, he said that continued economic and political stability and predictability should encourage greater FDI in Turkey.

18. (C) Babacan acknowledged Turkey needs to do more to improve the investment climate; legal and judicial reform were particularly important. He noted that bilateral trade with the U.S. was growing at a slower pace than Turkey's overall foreign trade, and said that the U.S. should remain an important economic partner for Turkey even as Turkey grew closer to the EU. The World Bank would support reforms, but he predicted the IMF's role will decline as economic stability becomes better entrenched. Representatives Whitfield and Wexler emphasized the importance of a clean and fair judicial system. Wexler highlighted the problems faced by U.S. companies, notably Motorola and Eli Lilly.

19. (C) Babacan said the AKP government was committed to legal reform, but that had to proceed carefully so as not to be accused of eroding judicial independence. He cited Motorola's problems as an example of how the courts had stymied the GOT's efforts to recover funds stolen by the Uzan family (which defrauded GOT-insured depositors in its banks as well as Motorola) and its efforts to reach a final settlement with Motorola.

FM Gul

10. (C) Calling relations with the U.S. "special", Gul asked the Study Group for its views. Representative Whitfield undertook to pursue more initiatives to end the isolation of northern Cyprus. Praising various GOT initiatives, Representative Wexler reiterated Washington's concern over Syria, Assad's sponsorship of terrorism, and Syria's negative role in Iraq. If Erdogan were to give to President Bush the same response he had given the Study Group, the reaction would be one of extraordinary astonishment. In Washington talks at the end of May, Abu Mazen and his delegation said that the Palestinians' major concern is not Sharon or Israel, but rather Hizbollah. Moreover, Hizbollah's continued existence as a separate armed force is inconsistent with Lebanon's exercise of sovereignty. What message does the GOT deliver to the Syrians and Iranians regarding Hizbollah?

11. (C) Gul answered merely by expressing in general terms common Turkish-U.S. interests in democracy in the region and praising the Study Group's visit to northern Cyprus. Regarding Syria, Gul said Turkey wants to see common values flourish in the whole region. Old habits continue, to be sure, but Syria is Turkey's neighbor; families are separated, creating a humanitarian issue. Gul opined that Turkey's approach is helping Syria change positively. There are different power centers in Syria, Turkey is realistic, and the U.S. should see Turkey's relations with Syria in this overall context.

12. (C) Concerning Iraq, Gul said the danger is that the country will become a new breeding ground for terrorists and terrorism will become more problematic in the future as a result. Gul called for greater U.S./Turkish cooperation. The GOT appreciated U.S. efforts to encourage Ja'afari to visit Ankara for what were very good talks.

13. (C) Concerning Lebanon and Hizbollah, Gul asserted that Hariri had been "a good friend". However, Lebanon is fragile, and we should all help the Lebanese, but through gradual steps. Gul thought it be possible to create unified Lebanese forces including Hizbollah and said all should help them.

CHOD Ozkok

14. (C) Turkish General Staff (TGS) Chief General Hilmi Ozkok welcomed the Congressional Study Group warmly. He provided a brief history of US-Turkish security cooperation. Ozkok allowed that the Iraq War was "a little different" because of the March 1, 2003 parliamentary vote preventing the 4th Infantry Division from passing through Turkey. Nonetheless, he argued, this was only a part of the Iraq operation. The

uncertainty of what Turkey would do before March 1 and whether the vote might be reconsidered kept Iraqi troops fixed in the north. Turkey opened its air space to coalition aircraft and missiles, and permitted special forces and intelligence personnel and even vehicles to transit. Any accusation that Turkey did not cooperate with the war effort was "cruel."

15. (C) Ozkok said another example of close military-to-military cooperation among the two countries' senior officers was the July 4 incident in Suleymania (when US forces arrested Turkish special forces for plotting to kill a local mayor). Ozkok said the frank discussions he was able to have with SACEUR/EUCOM CDR General James Jones and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Richard Myers because of their long-standing close relationship helped contain the damage that incident inflicted on the relationship. U.S. press reports about problems within the bilateral relationship caused TGS to reexamine the state of affairs. The conclusion was that, while there are problems, there is no crisis in relations. He denied the existence of anti-Americanism in Turkey, allowing only that there was a temporary rise in suspicions about U.S. intentions in the region.

16. (C) Ozkok was effusive in expressing appreciation for the Group's visit to northern Cyprus. Representative Wexler said that he and his colleagues would be considering other steps to help ease the Turkish Cypriots' isolation. He also expressed appreciation for PM Erdogan's handling of the issue. Ozkok believed the trip to the north would help resolve the Cyprus issue, but worried the Greek Cypriots believed time was on their side. Turkey had already agreed in the Annan Plan to reduce its military presence to 650 persons, now it was the other side's turn, but little attention is paid to the south's military forces. Pressure on Nicosia from the U.S. or the UK would help, he said.

17. (C) Turning to regional issues, Ozkok expressed strong support for the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative (BMENAI), asserting that democratization in the region benefits Turkey's security. He devoted several minutes to an explanation about why Turks chafe when others refer to Turkey as an "Islamic country;" "secularism is essential for democracy," he declared. He also argued that Turkey should not be considered a "model" for the region, although he accepted that it might inspire others to strive for democracy.

18. (C) Regarding Central Asia, he worried competition for access to the region's resources by China, Russia and India would require Turkey and the U.S. to move quickly to ensure their own access and market share. Ozkok observed that the importance of the Black Sea was increasing, and that there were suspicions of various forms of trafficking and persons occurring in the region. He thought the littoral states should have primary responsibility for maintaining security in the maritime area. Having others do it could run up against Montreaux Convention limitations on foreign warships in the straits and in the Black Sea, he said.

19. (C) Representative Wexler expressed appreciation for Ozkok's presentation, for Turkey's contributions to Afghanistan, and for Turkey's hosting for a decade the forces that enforced the northern no-fly zone (NFZ) over Iraq that contributed to preparing the battlefield for the Iraq War. Ozkok agreed about the NFZ preparing the battlefield, and noted that doing so gave rise to Kurdish autonomy that could create problems for Turkey later.

20. (C) Wexler noted that there was confusion over the messages Turkey seemed to be sending on Syria. Coordinating Turkish policy toward Syria and Iraq with the USG would be important for the future of the relationship. He hoped Ozkok was giving the PM good advice.

21. (C) Representative Whitfield relayed CJCS Gen. Myers' regards to Ozkok. He noted that senior officers at Fort Campbell, in his district, had emphasized Turkey's importance. He thanked Ozkok for his leadership. Representatives Deal and Johnson echoed Whitfield's remarks.

22. (C) Representative Wexler asked Ozkok for his assessment of Iran's nuclear program and asked why Turkey had not taken any initiatives in the OIC on the issue. Ozkok demurred, saying that this was a political matter more appropriately addressed to MFA. Nonetheless, he offered that Turkey needed to be a bit "softer" with its neighbors; however, that did not mean that Turkey did not share the same evaluation of the threat. The nuclear axis -- China, India, Pakistan, maybe Iran -- is approaching Turkey. Iran's beginning nuclear enrichment would "make it difficult for me to sleep," he said. He advocated a peaceful solution, like the EU-3 process, that took into account the emotional nature of the Iranian people and their perceptions of the world.

123. (C) Defense Minister Vecdi Gonul hosted a lunch for the delegation where he highly praised the Group for the visit to north Cyprus. He welcomed the opportunity to meet with "true friends" to discuss bilateral relations and ways to improve security and cooperation around the world. He said that he viewed Turkey and the U.S. as "two indispensable partners, and we must act like it." Turning to regional issues, Gonul declared Turkey's support in bringing peace, prosperity and stability to Iraq, citing the approval of the Incirlik logistics cargo hub. He noted that eliminating the PKK presence in Iraq would be important in stabilizing Iraq and greatly appreciated by the Turkish people. He pointed to the BTC pipeline as an example of the U.S. and Turkey's "unique partnership." He closed by expressing appreciation for the delegation members' courage in standing up to pressure on issues such as the Armenian genocide resolution.

124. (C) Representative Wexler responded by noting that the Study Group was one of only four in Congress and its existence reflects the importance of the bilateral relationship. He noted that the great friendship the two countries enjoyed allowed for the discussion of problems in a positive way. On the genocide resolution, he praised Erdogan's transparency in opening Turkey's archives and called on Armenia to reciprocate. Finally, on the delegation's visit to north Cyprus, Wexler characterized it as a symbolic gesture to end isolation, and he reiterated that the delegation would explore other steps after it returned to Washington. He commended Erdogan and Turkey for embracing the Annan Plan.

PM Erdogan Advisor Celik

125. (C) After the Study Group departed, Representative Wexler met individually with PM Erdogan policy advisor (and parliamentarian) Omer Celik. Wexler pressed Celik hard on Syria and Iran. In an arid, jargon-filled, abstract response, Celik claimed he is the voice of pro-Western reason, whereas some others in the GOT do not recognize the dangers. However, he added, it is important to proceed prudently.

PM Erdogan Advisor Davutoglu

126. (C) Representative Wexler also delivered a tough message on Syria to Erdogan foreign policy advisor Ahmet Davutoglu. Davutoglu claimed to be pleased at the "direct" communication. He justified Turkey's warming relations with Syria as part of Turkey's strategy to achieve "stability" and reduce tension in relations with neighboring countries. He urged Wexler not to misperceive Turkish intentions toward Syria: Turkey does not support totalitarianism, seeks a more democratic Syria, and has urged Syria not to interfere in Lebanon.

127. (C) Ambassador Edelman replied that, given Davutoglu's recitation of Turkey's policy aims, its Syrian strategy has been an abject failure: despite Turkey's supposed urgings over the past months, Syria manipulated Lebanese politics, delayed withdrawal, and is at least indirectly responsible for Hariri's murder. Moreover, the international community has perceived Turkish policy as a lifeline to the Assad regime. The Ambassador warned Davutoglu that this policy is not credible in Washington. Davutoglu doubted that pressure would have been more effective; he then changed the subject, citing Turkey's domestic reforms and its policy in other areas. The Ambassador told Davutoglu PM Erdogan would hear more about Turkey's Syria policy in Washington. "We will try to develop convincing arguments," Davutoglu replied.

Istanbul Meetings

128. (C) In Istanbul, the Study Group focused on religious freedom issues, meeting both with representatives of the Jewish Community and of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Discussion with Jewish Community President Silvyo Ovadyo and Vice Presidents Sami Herman and Lina Filiba focused on the recent surge of anti-semitism in Turkey, including the worrying fact that "Mein Kampf" has made several bestseller lists. Ovadyo stressed his belief, however, that modern technology has made the surge seem more dramatic than it actually is. Anti-Semitic writings in obscure journals have always existed in Turkey, he argued. The difference today is that with the internet, such opinions are more accessible to a broader audience, which makes them seem more prevalent. He questioned, however, whether that in fact was the case. At the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Metropolitan Meliton of Philadelphia outlined the property, educational, and succession issues that confront the institution, and presented a paper to Representative Whitfield providing

further details.

129. (C) In addition, the Study Group participated in events commemorating the 20th anniversary of the Turkish-American Business Council (TAIK), with retired Representatives Larocco and Buechner participating in morning panel discussions at Bogazici University, and Representative Whitfield delivering the keynote address at TAIK's anniversary dinner.

130. (U) The Study Group/Wexler CODEL did not have an opportunity to clear this cable.
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